RESEARCH ARTICLE

Shree Bheemalingeshwara Swamy

Known as Shree Vemulawada Bheemakavi

Divine Poet-Saint of the Godavari Delta • Master of Chaatuvu • Divine Son of Lord Bheemeshwara

by Bheemesh Kacharagadla [Raghu] and ib review

Poet's Name	Shree Bheemalingeshwara Swamy (Vemulawada Bheemakavi)
Also Known As	Bheemakavi, Bheemanna, Vemulawada Bhima
Parents	Smt Machhamma and Shree Somanathamayudu
Period	11th–16th CE
Birth Period	11th Century, Shravana Shukla Panchami, Friday
Birthplace	Vemulawada, Karapa Mandal, East Godavari District, Andhra Pradesh
Proximity	Near Draksharamam (Pancharama Kshetra), close to River Godavari
Divine Father	Shree Lord Bheemeshwara Swamy, Draksharamam
Literary Style	Chaatuvu (spontaneous witty verse)
Language	Telugu
Chronological Place	After Nannayya Bhatta; before Tikkanna
First Documented	Cavelly Venkata Ramaswamie, Biographical Sketches of Dekkan Poets (1829)

Abstract

Shree Bheemalingeshwara Swamy — venerated across the Telugu-speaking world as Vemulawada Bheemakavi — stands as one of the most luminous and spiritually exalted figures in the history of Telugu literature. Born in Vemulawada, Karapa Mandal, East Godavari district, Andhra Pradesh, in close proximity to the sacred Pancharama Kshetra of Draksharamam and the holy River Godavari, he is regarded not merely as a mortal poet but as a direct incarnation of the Lord Bheemeshwara Swamy of Draksharamam. His life, woven from divine grace, social adversity, miraculous powers, and spontaneous poetic brilliance, occupies an unparalleled place in the classical tradition of Telugu letters. This article provides a comprehensive scholarly examination of his geographic and cultural origins, the legend of his divine birth, his literary contributions in the Chaatuvu style, his known works, his extensive travels, and his enduring legacy in Andhra's spiritual and literary heritage.

1. Introduction

The history of Telugu literature is adorned with poet-saints who transformed devotion into immortal verse. Among them, Shree Vemulawada Bheemakavi holds a singular and extraordinary place — celebrated simultaneously as a supreme master of the Chaatuvu style of poetry and as a divine being born of the grace of Lord Bheemalingeshwara Swamy, the presiding deity of Draksharamam.

The sacred geography that shaped Bheemakavi is the lush delta country of the Godavari river in East Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh. His birth village of Vemulawada in Karapa Mandal lies in the spiritual shadow of Draksharamam — one of the five Pancharama Kshetras, the holiest Shaivite Shreenes of Andhra Pradesh — and the proximity of this sacred landscape to his life is no coincidence. The very Lord enShreened in the great temple at Draksharamam, Sri Bheemeshwara Swamy, is understood in devotional tradition to be the divine father of the poet himself.

His pen name, Bheemakavi — the poet of Bheema (Lord Bheemeshwara) — encapsulates this inseparable bond between the mortal poet and his divine origin. For centuries, his story has been celebrated in oral tradition, devotional biography, classical anthologies, and, in the modern era, in film and popular culture. He is not merely a literary figure; he is a saint, a miracle-worker, and a demi-god revered by millions.

2. Geographical and Historical Context

2.1 Vemulawada, Karapa Mandal — The Birthplace

The Vemulawada associated with Bheemakavi is the village in Karapa Mandal, East Godavari district, Andhra Pradesh — a fertile, spiritually rich landscape on the coastal delta of the River Godavari. The village lies close to the natural waterway Tulyabhaga (also called Jamadagni) and is situated in the immediate vicinity of Draksharamam and Samarlakota (Samalkota). The nearby towns of Kakinada to the east and Samarlakota to the west frame this sacred territory.

This Vemulawada is distinct from the town of the same name in the present-day Rajanna Siricilla district of Telangana (historically Lembulawada), with which some later scholars have occasionally confused the birthplace of Bheemakavi. The East Godavari Vemulawada, by contrast, has always been a Telugu-speaking region and lies in the direct sacred orbit of the Bheemeshwara temple tradition.

2.2 Draksharamam — The Sacred Centre

Draksharamam, situated in Ramachandrapuram Mandal of East Godavari district, is one of the five Pancharama Kshetras — the most venerated Shaivite Shreenes of Andhra Pradesh, all housing fragments of the divine Sivalinga of Tarakasura. The presiding deity, Sri Bheemeshwara Swamy, is enShreened here alongside Goddess Manikyamba Devi. The temple is also recognised as an Ashtadasa Shakti Peetha, the spot where the left cheek of Goddess Sati is believed to have fallen.

The Draksharamam Bheemeshwara temple was constructed by the Eastern Chalukyan king Bhima of Vengi in the 9th–10th centuries CE and contains more than 400 inscriptions spanning the Chalukya, Chola, and Kalinga dynasties. The Shivalinga, known as the Spatika Lingam, towers at approximately 14–15 feet and is considered a Swayambhu (self-manifested) lingam. The temple is known as Dakshina Kashi, the Kashi of the South, and according to ancient tradition, the boundary of the Telugu country (Trilinga Desa) is marked by Draksharamam in the east, Kaleshwaram in the north, and Srisailam in the west.

It is this supreme Lord Bheemeshwara Swamy of Draksharamam who is understood, in the devotional biography of Bheemakavi, to be his divine father — making the poet not merely a devotee of the temple but its living offspring.

2.3 The Historical Period

Scholarly traditions place Bheemakavi in the 9th century CE, with some other accounts assigning him to the 11th or even 12th–13th centuries. He is universally understood to have lived after Aadi Kavi Nannayya Bhatta, the father of Telugu literature who rendered the first two and a half cantos of the Mahabharata into Telugu, and before the great poet Tikkanna (13th century). This positions him in the formative classical era of Telugu literary production, when the language was establishing its canonical forms under Sanskrit-educated poet-scholars of the Vengi Chalukya and subsequent courts.

3. The Legend of Divine Birth

3.1 A Widow's Prayer at the Bheemeshwara Temple

The origin of Bheemakavi's life is recorded in hagiographical works and preserved across centuries of oral tradition in the Godavari delta. At the heart of this story is a devout widow who, longing for a child, offered years of earnest and unbroken prayer at the Bheemeshwara Temple (associated with the Draksharamam tradition). Her devotion was so pure and relentless that the Lord himself was moved to respond.

One night, Lord Bheemalingeshwara Swamy appeared to the widow in a dream and spoke his divine promise:

> *"One of my powers shall come into you as a child."*

True to this divine word, the widow conceived miraculously — without any earthly union — and in due course gave birth to a son who was named Bheemanna. The child had come not from mortal parentage but from a portion of the divine energy of Shree Bheemalingeshwara Swamy himself.

3.2 Childhood, Ridicule, and the Quest for the Father

Bheemanna's early life was shadowed by the stigma that medieval society placed on a child born to a widow without a known father. His schoolmates taunted and ridiculed him relentlessly. The wound of this social rejection grew until, unable to bear it further, the young Bheemanna confronted his mother and demanded the truth about his father's identity.

His mother, with the courage of her conviction, revealed the sacred truth: his father was none other than Lord Bheemeshwara Swamy himself. Bheemanna — his heart burning with the emotions of a child both wounded and electrified by this revelation — went directly to the Bheemeshwara temple and confronted the Lord in an act that combined anger, grief, and unshakeable faith. The confrontation between the mortal son and his divine father was transformative.

The Lord acknowledged the poet and bestowed upon him an extraordinary boon:

> *"Whatever Bheemakavi wishes shall come to pass; whatever he speaks shall become poetry."*

With this divine benediction, the boy Bheemanna was reborn as Bheemakavi — the poet whose every utterance was verse and whose every desire was destiny. His very words now carried the authority of the divine will of Lord Bheemalingeshwara Swamy.

4. Literary Contributions and Poetic Style

4.1 The Chaatuvu Tradition

The literary mode that defines Bheemakavi's genius is the Chaatuvu — a genre of spontaneous, witty, sharp, and often devotionally charged verse that flourished in medieval Telugu literature. The term Chaatuvu connotes a clever or extempore composition: compact, brilliant, and instantly memorable. These verses could serve as eulogies, satires, devotional hymns, social observations, or moral maxims, and were typically composed on the spot in response to a situation.

Bheemakavi is revered as one of the supreme masters of this form. The ease and perfection of his extempore compositions — seen by his contemporaries as proof of his divine boon — gave him an aura of supernatural literary authority. His Chaatuvu verses circulated widely and were preserved in oral tradition and later anthologised in classical Telugu collections.

His style bridged two worlds: the formal, Sanskrit-influenced poetic tradition of early Telugu literature, and a more direct, vernacular expressiveness that reached ordinary people. This double appeal — to learned scholars and common devotees alike — is one reason his memory has survived with such vitality.

4.2 Known Works

Several works are attributed to Bheemakavi. The major ones are listed below:

- Raghava Pandaveeyam — A celebrated Dvyarthi Kavya (dual-meaning poem) that simultaneously narrates both the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. This showcases extraordinary poetic virtuosity. The text is referenced in historical scholarship but is no longer extant.
- Nrusimha Puranam — A devotional composition in honour of Lord Narasimha. Referenced in scholarly literature but not currently available.
- Kavijanasrayam — A treatise on Telugu prosody, historically attributed to Bheemakavi, though later scholarly analysis has largely concluded that his authorship of this particular text is unlikely.
- Chaatuvu Corpus — The living heart of his legacy: a vast body of spontaneous verses preserved in oral tradition and subsequently anthologised in works such as Deepala Pichchayya Sastry's Chatu Padya Ratnakaramu (1927) and Veturi Prabhakara Sastry's Prabanda Ratnavali (1918, pp. 28–35).

His work is referenced in Gadiyaram Ramakrishna Sarma's Simhasana Dwatrinshika (1982, p. 73) and is included in the Kendra Sahitya Akademi's Encyclopaedia of Indian Literature (Datta, 2003), confirming his canonical status in Indian literary heritage.

4.3 The Miracle of Extempore Verse

A defining feature of Bheemakavi's poetic genius was the capacity for instantaneous, flawless composition in any situation. Traditional accounts describe him composing perfect verses in royal courts, temples, roadside encounters, and popular gatherings — without hesitation or revision. This gift, understood as the direct expression of his divine boon from Lord Bheemalingeshwara, set him apart from all contemporaries.

His verses frequently carried layers of meaning — surface wit concealing deeper moral or devotional content. They commented on social hypocrisy, celebrated divine grace, and captured

the full range of human experience in a handful of perfect lines. It is this quality that caused him to be called not just a great poet but a Kavi Sekhara — the crown jewel among poets.

5. Travels and Wider Influence

Unlike many classical Telugu poets who remained attached to a single royal court or region, Bheemakavi was a widely travelled figure. According to Cavelly Venkata Ramaswamie's foundational 1829 account in Biographical Sketches of Dekkan Poets, the poet journeyed to several distant lands:

- Karnata (present-day Karnataka)
- Maharatta (present-day Maharashtra)
- Sajanagar / Kalinga (the region near Peddapuram in East Godavari district, ruled by Kalingas and Eastern Chalukyas / Vengi Chalukyas)

These journeys broadened his cultural exposure and spread his reputation far beyond his native Godavari delta. Ramaswamie noted that the stories of his miraculous feats were universally credited and were in the mouths of women and children throughout the Telugu provinces. His fame was not merely literary — it was the fame of a living legend, a wonder-worker, a demi-god in human form.

The social dimension of his story also carried a powerful implicit message. Born to a widow, branded by social stigma from childhood, and yet rising to become the most celebrated poet of his age through divine grace — Bheemakavi's life was itself a poem about the irrelevance of social hierarchy in the face of divine will.

6. Scholarly Documentation and Traditions

6.1 First Formal Record

The first formal scholarly documentation of Bheemakavi's life appears in 1829, in Cavelly Venkata Ramaswamie's Biographical Sketches of Dekkan Poets, published in Calcutta by the Literary and Antiquarian Department (p. 114). This pioneering work identifies the poet, describes his miraculous origin, and records the popular traditions surrounding his life and powers. It remains the foundational text for all subsequent research.

6.2 Subsequent Scholarship

Following Ramaswamie's record, a rich tradition of scholarship developed around Bheemakavi throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. Key figures include:

- Veturi Prabhakara Sastry (1918) — Prabanda Ratnavali, Tirumala Tirupati Devastanam (pp. 28–35)
- Deepala Pichchayya Sastry (1927) — Chatu Padya Ratnakaramu, anthologising his Chaatuvu verses
- Jonnalagadda (1938) — Shree Vemulawada Bheemakavi Charitra (second edition)
- Gadiyaram Ramakrishna Sarma (1982) — Simhasana Dwatrinshika, Andhra Pradesh Sahitya Academy
- Amaresh Datta (2003) — Encyclopaedia of Indian Literature, Sahitya Akademi (ISBN 9788126018031)

The Shree Bheemalingeshwara Swamy Adhyayana Kendram (Research Centre) has been established specifically to preserve and propagate knowledge of the poet-saint, publishing biographies, devotional texts, and research volumes in Telugu.

7. Shree Bheemalingeshwara Swamy — The Divine Identity

The theological core of Bheemakavi's story is not simply that he was a great poet who happened to be devoted to Lord Bheemeshwara. His tradition understands him to be an earthly incarnation — an amsha (divine portion) — of Shree Bheemalingeshwara Swamy himself. This is the meaning of the Lord's own words in the dream: 'one of my powers shall come into you as a child.'

This understanding elevates every aspect of his life. His verses are not merely skilled compositions — they are expressions of divine will in poetic form. His miraculous powers — the ability to make his wishes come true, to compose perfect poetry at will — are not human talents but divine attributes carried from the sacred realm into mortal life. His very existence in the world is an act of divine grace, precipitated by a widow's pure prayer at the feet of Lord Bheemeshwara.

This relationship between the poet and the deity of Draksharamam makes the sacred geography of the East Godavari delta central to the Bheemakavi tradition. The Bheemeshwara temple at Draksharamam — with its towering Swayambhu Spatika Lingam, its Pancharama sanctity, its Shakti Peetha status, and its ancient Chalukya heritage — is not merely the backdrop to the story. It is the source from which the poet-saint himself emerged.

> *"He was born of the Bheemeshwara's grace, composed poetry by Bheemeshwara's boon, and remains inseparable from the divine presence of Draksharamam."*

8. The Later Journey: Incarnation, Samadhi, and Gadekallu

8.1 Incarnation across 101 Sacred Regions

Having fulfilled his purpose as the poet-saint Bheemakavi, Shree Bheemalingeshwara Swamy proceeded to his next and supreme stage — the stage for which he had truly incarnated on earth. He spread his divine presence across approximately 101 regions throughout Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, manifesting his sanctity and grace across the land. In about 99 of these villages, he established himself in the form of a Shivalinga, consecrating the earth with his sacred presence and blessing each region with divine protection.

8.2 Beldona — The 100th Region and the Sacred Samadhi

The 100th region in this sacred journey was Beldona village, located in Kurnool district of Andhra Pradesh. At Beldona, the Swamiji performed deep and arduous penance, and it was here that he attained Samadhi — the state of divine mergence. As a mark of his holy presence and in remembrance of his final earthly sojourn at this place, the Lord's sacred shoes (padukas) were placed at the Samadhi, enShreening the site as a place of great veneration and pilgrimage for the devotees of Shree Bheemalingeshwara Swamy.

8.3 Chabala — Encounter with Sanjeevamma Swami

From Beldona, Shree Bheemalingeshwara Swamy journeyed onward to the Chabala region, situated in Ananthapur district of Andhra Pradesh. Here he spent a number of days, during which he came into contact with the saintly Sanjeevamma Swami. Drawn by her devotion, the Swamiji chose to remain in her presence and accepted her service, becoming, in the manner of a humble

ascetic, her devoted attendant. This sacred relationship between the divine Swamiji and Sanjeevamma Swami became one of the most cherished episodes of his later earthly sojourn.

8.4 Gadekallu — The Jeevasamadhi and the Grace of Sanjeevamma

From Chabala, the Swamiji proceeded to a place called Gadekallu (also spelled Gadekal), located in Anantapur district of Andhra Pradesh. Around the 16th century CE, it was here at Gadekallu that Shree Bheemalingeshwara Swamy attained Jeevasamadhi — the state of living mergence with the divine — and became a perpetual spiritual presence in the earth itself. He remained at Gadekallu for many days before this final mergence, and the site became imbued with his enduring divine energy.

Upon learning that the Swamiji had arrived at Gadekallu, Sanjeevamma Swami followed and took special and devoted care of him during this sacred final period. The Lord, deeply moved by the sincerity and purity of Sanjeevamma's selfless service, bestowed upon her a rare and precious boon: the divine power of penance (tapas shakti), enabling her own spiritual journey to reach its highest fulfilment.

8.5 The Divine Gift of Fakkirappa

After the Swamiji's passing from earthly form, the divine grace of Shree Bheemalingeshwara Swamy continued to watch over Sanjeevamma. As a final act of compassion and in recognition of her lifelong devotion and service, she was blessed with a divine child — a boy named Fakkirappa — who came to her as a sacred gift to comfort and sustain her in her later years. Fakkirappa, understood in devotional tradition as a divine child born of the Lord's grace, became the living continuation of the Swamiji's compassionate lineage at Gadekallu.

> *"From Vemulawada to 101 sacred regions, from Beldona to Chabala, and finally to Gadekallu — Shree Bheemalingeshwara Swamy's earthly journey was itself an act of boundless divine grace."*

9. Legacy and Cultural Endurance

9.1 Veneration as Demi-God

Across the Telugu-speaking world — and particularly in the Godavari delta region — Bheemakavi is venerated not merely as a celebrated historical poet but as a divine being. The miracles attributed to him in oral tradition, the divine boon he received, and the nature of his birth have together ensured that his memory lives on as that of a demi-god rather than a mortal man.

The Shree Bheemalingeshwara Swamy Adhyayana Kendram continues this tradition of active veneration, maintaining his biography, publishing his story, and keeping the scholarly and devotional memory of the poet-saint alive for new generations.

9.2 Honours and Memorials

In 1935, the Nizam Andhra Sabha organised at Sircilla honoured his memory by naming the venue Bhima Kavi Nagar — a tribute that demonstrated his cultural prominence even during the nationalist period of Indian history.

In 1976, the legendary Telugu actor-filmmaker N. T. Rama Rao produced and starred in the biographical Telugu film Vemulawada Bheemakavi, directed by D. Yoganand, with music by Pendyala Nageswara Rao and lyrics by C. Narayana Reddy. The film brought the story of the poet-saint to mass audiences across Telugu-speaking India, immortalising his legend in the popular imagination.

With boundless devotion and unwavering faith in Shree Bheemalingeshwara Swamy, the sacred villages of Beldona and Gadekallu have preserved a divine tradition for generations. In almost every household, at least one member is lovingly named after the presiding deity, bearing blessed names such as Bheemesh, Bheemalingappa, Bheemalingamma, Bheemakka, Bheemeshwara Rao, or Bheemanna. Such names are not merely identities, but sacred offerings of devotion, symbolizing the eternal bond between the devotees and their beloved Lord Bheemalingeshwara.

The deep spiritual reverence of the people extends even to their livelihoods, as many devotees lovingly name their business establishments after the deity, seeking His divine grace and blessings in every endeavor. Whenever prayers are answered and cherished wishes are fulfilled, devotees humbly offer “Devaralu” and faithfully fulfill their sacred vows in gratitude to the Lord.

The divine glory of Shree Bheemalingeshwara Swamy shines magnificently during the grand Rathotsavam celebrations, which are observed with immense devotion and spiritual fervor for nearly six days. In Beldona village, these sacred festivities commence on the auspicious Full Moon day of the Chaitra month, while in Gadekallu village they are celebrated during the holy month of Ashada. Thousands of devotees gather to witness the majestic chariot procession, chanting the Lord’s name with reverence and joy.

Equally significant are the splendid celebrations held on Shravana Shukla Panchami, the sacred day believed to mark the divine birth of Shree Bheemalingeshwara Swamy. The entire region resonates with devotional songs, rituals, and prayers as devotees immerse themselves in divine bliss.

On the holy night of Karthika Amavasya, a deeply spiritual lamp-lighting ceremony is performed in both villages by unmarried young men and women. It is a cherished belief among the devotees that lighting a sacred lamp before the deity on this auspicious New Moon night invites divine blessings, prosperity, and the fulfillment of righteous desires, especially for those seeking a blessed future and harmonious married life.

Thus, the sacred traditions of Beldona and Gadekallu stand as timeless expressions of devotion, faith, gratitude, and divine connection to Shree Bheemalingeshwara Swamy.

9.3 Place in the Telugu Literary Canon

Bheemakavi’s mastery of the Chaatuvu form represents a significant and distinct contribution to the classical Telugu literary tradition. His position between Nannayya and Tikkanna — in the very heart of the golden age of Telugu poetry — places him at a critical juncture in the language’s literary development. His ability to combine Sanskrit-derived formal excellence with direct, vernacular expressiveness anticipated the later bhakti poetry tradition and demonstrated the full range of the Telugu poetic voice.

Koravi Goparaju’s 15th-century Simhasana Dwatrinshika praises ‘Lemulawada’s glory and Bhima’ in dedicated verse immediately after honouring Nannayya and before Tikkanna — confirming that even medieval scholars recognised Bheemakavi as a canonical figure of the highest order. The verse, ‘lemulawada bheema bhalire kavi sekhara saarvabhoumunemani’ (“Lemulawada Bheema, hail, the sovereign crown-jewel of poets”), captures the esteem in which he was held.

10. Conclusion

Shree Bheemalingeshwara Swamy — known to all as Vemulawada Bheemakavi — is one of the most extraordinary figures in the long tradition of Telugu literature and Shaivite devotion. Born in Vemulawada, Karapa Mandal, in the sacred delta of the Godavari river, nurtured in the spiritual atmosphere of the great Pancharama Kshetra of Draksharamam, and endowed with miraculous powers by Lord Bheemeshwara Swamy himself, he stands at the confluence of the human and the divine.

His life story — a widow's prayer answered by the Lord, a child's anguished quest for identity, a divine boon that made every word a poem and every wish a reality, a poet's genius celebrated across the Deccan — is itself the greatest of all his verses: composed not by mortal hand alone but by the grace of the Supreme Lord of the Godavari delta.

His Chaatuvu verses continue to be cited and celebrated. His biography continues to be published. His divine identity continues to draw pilgrims and devotees to the sacred geography of East Godavari. And the great Bheemeshwara Swamy of Draksharamam — whose Swayambhu Spatika Lingam towers above the sacred precinct of the Dakshina Kashi — continues to be worshipped, in part, as the divine father of the poet-saint who bore his name.

> *"Whatever Bheemakavi wishes shall come to pass; whatever he speaks shall become poetry."*

In this divine boon, the entire life and legacy of Shree Vemulawada Bheemakavi is summarised. He did not merely write poetry — he was poetry, embodied by the grace of Lord Bheemalingeshwara Swamy.

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